

# **National Governor's Association--Conc Enroll**

Press Release: Sept. 9, 2004

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## **Governors Set to Redesign America's High Schools**

### **NGA Chairman Virginia Gov. Mark Warner Says Initiative Will Survey 10,000 Students in Class of 2005**

**FALLS CHURCH, VA.**--The Chairman of the National Governors Association (NGA) Virginia Gov. Mark Warner today launched a yearlong initiative, "Redesigning the American High School," intended to spur states to enact real, tangible system-wide reform of high school. Gov. Warner said the reforms will allow every student to graduate better prepared either for college or a successful career.

Surrounded by educators, policymakers and high school students, the governor unveiled the plan at a morning press conference at George C. Marshall High School in Falls Church, Va. After the announcement, Gov. Warner sat down with a 12<sup>th</sup> grade class to discuss ideas and solicit input on his proposals to make high school, particularly senior year, more engaging and relevant.

"The nation's governors are eager to make sure high schools offer students the kinds of choices that will make a difference in their futures," said Gov. Warner. "Our goal is to begin to put into motion, in as many states as possible, the actions that help students make the best use of their high school years, and help families save up to a full semesters tuition."

As part of his initiative, Gov. Warner said NGA would conduct an online survey of high school seniors nationwide to solicit their ideas on possible reform proposals. Gov. Warner expects to survey 10,000 students by the time the nation's governors convene in Des Moines, Iowa next summer for the NGA Annual Meeting. "The voice of the students has been missing in this conversation about high school reform that has been going on among the experts and policymakers," Gov. Warner said. "The Class of 2005 may have the best ideas we need. If the students we are trying to help don't see the value of redesigning high school, we are wasting our time. We will seek out the ideas of parents, teacher and administrators, as well."

To restore rigor and relevance to the high school experience, Warner said, states must recognize that good jobs require more skills and education. States need a single educational pipeline that gives students the common, high-skills required by colleges and employers today. Governors can help bridge the divide between secondary and postsecondary systems by calling for college-ready standards and courses for all high school students. Further, the governor said seniors in every school system should have the opportunity to take college-level courses while still in high school. "States need collaborative agreements between high school and postsecondary institutions to assure students' hard work counts toward a college degree or an industry-recognized credential," he said.

The governor's "chairman's initiative," was driven in part by studies showing only 70 percent of high school students today graduate, and barely half of African American and Hispanic ninth graders complete high school in four years. At nearly 2,000 of the nation's high schools, graduation is no longer the norm--as the senior class is nearly 60 percent smaller than the freshman class that entered four years before. Gov. Warner said the high cost of high school

dropouts has very real consequences for our nation's economy and especially for the low-income and minority students who suffer most. "We are going to develop and recommend a common, national definition for drop-out and graduation rates that governors can use to compare their progress to other states," he said. "There is no way to know if we are succeeding if we can't adequately measure our progress."

Of those students that do graduate, only three in 10 are ready to attend a four-year college. While one in every three entering college freshman enrolls in a remedial course, nearly half of all entering freshman fail to earn a degree in six years. "College readiness rates in this country are abysmal. Too many states have been unable to administer high school exit exams because they know too many of their high school students would flunk the test," Gov. Warner said. "States must put in place system-wide intervention and remediation programs so seniors can pass these tests, but more importantly so we know that they are ready to make the transition to college or a good job."

Gov. Warner said students and parents should expect more from their high schools. The governor noted that the American high school hasn't gone through a radical re-examination in more than a century and given the tremendous changes in technology and the economy in the last decade, let alone the last 100 years, blindly conducting education as usual is unacceptable. Every student in America should have the opportunity to earn postsecondary credit or an industry-recognized credential while still in high school, Warner said, pointing to Marshall High School's Academy for Vocational Education that has partnerships in place with Ford Motor Company, Cisco Systems and Booz Allen Hamilton.

Gov. Warner has recruited three governors--Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, Maine Gov. John Baldacci and Ohio Gov. Bob Taft--for his Chairman's Task Force. With the help of NGA Center for Best Practices, teachers, administrators, business leaders, policymakers, parents and students, the task force will develop and highlight the necessary tools governors need to implement real, tangible system-wide reform.

In addition, the task force's work over the next year will allow governors to identify and act on state policies to help states create a system of top-notch high schools, by:

- convening a national education summit on high school at the NGA Winter Meeting in February;
- hosting a learning institute for governors' senior education advisors;
- developing a series of best practices and a "Top 10 List" of achievable policy actions; and
- organizing a series of televised town hall meetings around the country to talk about high school, the senior year and impediments to greater success.